

begin storing these familiar sounds in his/her aural memory causing recognition whenever he/she is able to listen to them.

Second, exposure to live or recorded vocal music will help the child distinguish a melody, a singer's voice, and/or tune whether he/she has been introduced to it or encountered it from a live musical experience or a recorded one. Then the blind infant will begin to distinguish that melody from among the other noises heard within the setting where he/she is experiencing all types of sounds, and start to identify that musical sound when in a different locale. However, as the youngster ages physically, he/she will be unable to recall visual stimuli such as a sunset or a rainbow. But, when a familiar melody is heard, immediate recognition through listening to it will occur in the developing non-sighted individual leading to the knowledge that his/her world involves a musical sound that is meaningful to him/her personally. Perhaps, the frequency of these recurring exposures will then encourage him/her to have music as a significant part of his/her ongoing life.

creativity matters

Inherent Creativity and the Road to Happiness: Improvisation and Composition in the Music Classroom

Steve Giddings

Abstract: In this article the author explores the concept of creativity in the classroom. He points out that children are inherently creative and, given the right environment, can create and compose wonderful music with very little guidance. He argues that, not only are improvisation and composition essential skills for modern musicians, but being involved in creative activities can greatly affect student well-being.

Creativity is something that music is inherently supposed to possess, but many music programs do not incorporate creativity into their musical learning. Students constantly *recreate* pieces of music and the teacher ends up being the creative one. I don't remember being creative at all in my junior high and high school band when I was in school. The only time I was creative was either on the drums in the school jazz band or in rock bands outside of school. Sure, I did a few improvised solos in the university jazz band but the first time I considered myself a composer and a creative trombonist was with my original ska band of two and a half years, The Sidewalks. We've all heard, "oh, you're a musician, you must be creative!" Sorry to disappoint

An added advantage, although not part of the initial discussion, that could result from these musical experiences is the discoveries that the caregivers – both those in the home, and those in a daycare – would learn regarding themselves. The providers may be looking after a sightless infant for the first time, and will then begin to “see” the world that this small person inhabits. If the primary nurturers have cared for a blind family member/client before, they will again have opportunities to use their instincts, creativity, and/or training. New methods concerning the ongoing musical interactions of the infant, and his/her providers could emerge which may or can only impact and enrich their lives – child, and nourishers – for good.



As a sightless individual, Dr. Lori Kernohan has earned Ph.D. (Music Education), M.MUS, B.MUS degrees from the University of Toronto, and A.R.C.T. Diploma (Clarinet Performer) from the Royal Conservatory of Music. She is a published author, conference presenter, and guest lecturer on topics relevant to music education, and accessibility issues. She taught Elementary School Music I and II at Laurentian University, Orillia, and gave private music lessons. She has experience as a researcher, dealing with accessibility issues at Georgian, and Seneca colleges, and continues to present her motivational program entitled, Pursue A Dream.



you, but just because we are musicians does not mean we are *creative* musicians. Music is the only art form where this is not synonymous. For example, if you are a dancer, chances are you've done some choreography. If you are a visual artist, chances are you have done some original artwork. If you are an architect, chances are you have designed original floor plans. Why is that not so with music? I considered myself to be a musician since grade 5 but not once in that whole school music experience do I remember getting to create my own music aside from the very limited time on the drums in jazz band. In reality, the only reason I was even on drums in the first place was because I was mostly self taught and did a ton of creating at home by myself and wanted to try something new.

My Music Room

Over the last few years that I have been at Montague Consolidated School I have tried to give students opportunities to make their own songs or to improvise. Just this past year, I had an activity where they were in groups and each group member was assigned a note from the *dob* pentatonic scale, which we had

done a lot of work on previously. The only parameters that I gave them were: your group has to remember how to play it, and you have to end on. Most of them had no idea what to do and started to learn songs that they knew the melody for already. They could not understand that they were making up their *own* song. Some students said, “But Mr. Giddings, that’s what real musicians do,” as if to say “hey, we can’t make up our own songs.” To which I replied “well, you draw your own pictures don’t you?” Some of the tunes they came up with were quite well thought through and others were simple but still worked.

On other occasions I have set up recorder solo ‘mosh pits’ where students are given a chance to create their own melodies without the insecurities of playing by themselves in front of everybody. Instead, students play an improvised melody at the same time as everyone else while I play a chord progression on the guitar so that there is no one person sticking out. Throughout this process there are opportunities for students to play an improvised solo by themselves over a chord progression. I usually do this once they have at least one scale learned. The best way to practice a scale is not by going up and down the scale all the time but by improvising with it. Improvising really helps the students get a handle on playing in any given key or mode. I learned that the hard way with The Sidewalks. Any horn player who has jammed with guitarists know that the easiest keys for guitar players are sharp keys. If you can’t play in E, A, B, D or G, you learn pretty quickly.

Children’s Inherent Creativity

Since I started playing guitar, I have realized it is one of those instruments that a person can easily be drawn into composing and improvising with. I have dabbled in a bit of composition and song writing with my guitar, but my problem is that I know too much and tend to over think and analyse what I’m doing. Children don’t have any of the inhibitions of a trained musician. In a TEDTalk that I saw recently by creativity advocate and scholar, Sir Ken Robinson, he mentioned that children from a very young age are not afraid to be wrong. If they don’t know, they “just give it a go” – they improvise. Unfortunately, he says, creativity is educated out of us pretty early on. We become too well ‘trained.’ He points out that “if you’re not prepared to be wrong, you will never come up with anything original.” I am a prime example of this, I have more years of training to be a musician than these kids have been alive and they seem to have song writing figured out!

There have been two school rock bands in two separate years that have written and performed their own songs. One band had their song, *Don’t Go*, recorded and can be heard at this address: http://stevsmusicroom.com/uploads/Don_t_Go_-_A_C_R_.mp3. I was impressed, both times, by how simple, but well thought out the songs were. The band this past year didn’t get a chance to record their song but the writing process they went through to performance was really quite remarkable. It was done in the same way that my band, The Sidewalks, wrote our songs, except that it happened much more efficiently. One of the student guitarists came to rehearsal one day with a very circular, four measure chord progression. He showed the progression to the other guitarists in the band and the drummers

started to play a beat. One of the singers, who was in grade 4 this year, started singing a melody almost instantaneously as if she had done it before. Her melody was really catchy and the rest of the band was immediately hooked. Within about 20 minutes of just ‘jamming out’ the new song, we had workable lyrics for a verse, a possible progression for a chorus and even a guitar solo! It really came together quite quickly, with very little guidance from me. All of this was able to happen because I facilitated an environment of trial and error so that students could feel safe improvising with their peers. At the same time, because they don’t have all of the training that I have had, they just do what sounds good and have very few inhibitions because they are not analysing and theorizing.

Why?

As soon as students create a song or piece of music of their own, they retain information better. That is why improvising with a new scale is better than going up and down it all the time. Bloom’s Taxonomy suggests that learning should always end with creating. In his revised taxonomy, creating is considered the highest level of thinking. Any teacher who follows Bloom’s Taxonomy can’t help but provide opportunities for students to explore their creativity. The same can be said about teaching a child to write. They are constantly being given opportunities to create stories or poems so that the concepts they are learning really take.

Being creative is essential to establishing a sense of ownership with students. Ryan and Deci (2000) refer to this as autonomy, one of three factors that are key to human happiness. Aside from autonomy, the other two factors are a sense of belonging and competence. Playing music of any kind, well, can easily create a sense of belonging and competence because if you are playing a song with a group of people chances are you feel a sense of belonging and are somewhat good at what is being played. It is possible to create ownership in student learning without creating, but it is much more difficult. Sure, your students might be happy, but they may be missing that essential part of human happiness – autonomy.

On another level, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1999) states that being involved in creative activities contributes to overall human well-being and happiness. Being in a state of ‘flow,’ as he calls it, is another way of ‘living in the moment.’ Flow is the experience where time flies and you are just enjoying the now. Any number of activities can contribute to flow but being in a creative environment is very conducive to experiencing it. This, he says, contributes to a person’s overall happiness. As musicians, we have all experienced what he calls ‘flow.’ Creative musicians constantly create flow by improvising and composing. It is a different type of flow that we experience while improvising and composing than when we are simply recreating a piece of music. If you have experienced it, you know what I mean. There is just something about creating an amazing piece of music, on the spot, that has never been heard before. While these students in the band were jamming, they were experimenting and improvising to find workable ideas, and in doing so, they too experienced this flow. It gave them the opportunity to forget what happened on the playground that day, to forget what mark they got on their spelling test, or to forget what might have been

going on at home. This is enough of a reason for us to be doing these kinds of activities with our students as much as we can. The more students can experience flow in this regard, the happier they have the potential to be.

How?

Keep in mind, students don't have to create entire songs to be creative. They can simply present form and arrangement ideas within a song: musical choices. I have had students make a musical choice where the bass line was changed at the end of *Eye of the Tiger* because they felt it sounded better that way. They were right, it did, and it didn't change the integrity of the song. Many times, the students at MCS have to make creative musical choices just to finish a song. Some songs we learn have an extended outro (opposite of an intro) or a fade out. It is often impossible to recreate some outros because they were created in the studio or they just don't sound right in a live setting. Also, it is always impossible to recreate a live fade out. Instead of worrying about how to do it, the students and I figure out a way to end the song that makes sense. Essentially, they create their own ending for most songs that they play.

Conclusion

Improvising is the first step to writing or composing music but for some reason song writers, composers, and musicians are often separated in the professional musical world. Music is the

only arts profession that seems to do this. As music educators, we need to get students to improvise and compose in our classrooms as much as we can to reduce the separation between composer and musician. Not only are improvisation and composition essential musical skills for modern musicians, the creative process has many implications for human well-being. If students are never exposed to improvisation or composition, are they really being given the skills to function as real world musicians? Are they actually being creative? Are they truly happy? I keep trying to give students as many opportunities as I can to be creative. If we can step back we might just realize how creative and musical our students actually are even if improvisation is not our strong suit. If you get a chance to listen to the song in the *Children's Inherent Creativity* section, you might just realize that they know more than you think they do. Incorporating and fostering these essential musical skills can bring the creativity back into being a musician and affect the life of a child in many different ways.



Steve teaches music at Montague Consolidated School in Prince Edward Island to students from kindergarten to grade 6. His duties include delivering music curriculum to over 400 students, leading 2 rock bands, multiple choirs, musicals and guitar classes. Recently, he has released his second album with Charlottetown band, The Sidewalks, called *Better Late Than Never...Again*. Currently, Steve is pursuing an M.Ed in Music Education from Acadia University and is the owner and operator of stevesmusicroom.com, a website catered to providing resources and ideas to Canadian music teachers. Any questions or comments can be forwarded to steve@stevesmusicroom.com.

in the spotlight

Canadian Association for Music Therapy 40th Anniversary Conference

"Celebrating 40 years of music therapy across the lifespan"
June 23-24, 2014 University of Toronto, Faculty of Music

This conference offers the opportunity to join with music therapists, music educators, healthcare professionals and music and medicine researchers and scholars from around the globe. You are invited to be stimulated and enriched by the latest music therapy practice and theory, while delving into and learning about expanding the art of music throughout the lifespan. Keynote speakers include: Dr. Jane Edwards, University of Limerick and Nancy McMaster, Professor, Capilano University. www.camtconference2014.ca

CMEA 2013 Professional Awards Announcement

The Canadian Music Educators Association would like to extend congratulations to both **Ardith Haley**, recipient of the CMEA Jubilate Award of Merit and **Dr. Nancy Vogan**, recipient of the CMEA Honourary Life Membership.

"Colleagues across Canada are impacted by the dedicated work of individuals like Ms. Haley and Dr. Vogan," said Mark Reid, President of the CMEA. "This level of recognition is reserved for those whose tireless effort reaches classrooms, research initiatives, and dialogue in every province and territory of our country." Donald Westcott, President of the Nova Scotia Music Educators' Association remarked that "this is a significant reminder of the high-caliber research and instruction taking place in Nova Scotia's

music education classrooms and research institutions."

The Jubilate Award of Merit and Honourary Life Membership will be conferred upon Ms. Haley and Dr. Vogan at the Nova Scotia Music Educators Annual Fall Conference on October 25, 2013 in Hammonds Plains, Nova Scotia.



Ardith Haley received her Bachelor of Music Education and Master of Education degrees from Acadia University, Wolfville Nova Scotia. She is the Arts Education Consultant for the Department of Education of the Province of Nova Scotia, responsible for the delivery of education programs in drama, visual arts, dance and music. As a part-time faculty member at Acadia University, Ardith co-conducts the Acadia Symphonic Band, teaches music education courses, is the Director of the Concert Band Camp, and is leading a new masters program in Curriculum Studies with a focus in Music Education. A passionate and widely respected music educator, Ardith is active as a guest conductor, clinician, and adjudicator and is well known for her innovative teaching strategies. Students as well as teachers benefit from her engaging workshops and professional development sessions. She is a recipient of the *Musica Viva Award*, in recognition of significant and continuing contributions to music education in Nova Scotia. Before moving to the Department, Ardith enjoyed a 27-year teaching career, successfully teaching instrumental and choral music to students in elementary, middle and high school.